Saddam Hussein
portrait in destroyed
Republican Guard
barracks

U.S. Navy (Alex C. Witte)

# Paralyzed
# or Pulverized?
## The Fall of the Republican Guard

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Television viewers around the world witnessed the symbolic end of Saddam Hussein's regime on April 9, 2003, as U.S. Marines helped Iraqi citizens destroy a statue of the dictator in Baghdad. Coming 3 weeks after the onset of Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, the scene seemed to vindicate the "fast and final" campaign plan of General Tommy Franks, USA, Commander, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)—a rapid, two-pronged attack along the Tigris-Euphrates crescent.

The statue's fall may also have validated tenets of classical military theory. With crowds dancing in the streets and Saddam in hiding, the regime appeared paralyzed by the rapid approach and seizure of the capital. In his seminal work, *Strategy*, B.H. Liddell Hart argued for precisely that effect—a psychological paralysis created by land maneuver. As Army V Corps and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force fought through regular and paramilitary resistance, bypassed Iraqi strongholds, and quickly pressed Baghdad, the regime could not respond. On the surface, then, the campaign plan appeared to be a textbook

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application of Liddell Hart's indirect-approach theory.

Appearances can be deceiving. In conjunction with the ground maneuver, the coalition air component conducted its own multifaceted operations, which, according to air component Commander Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley, USAF, ran the gamut

## Liddell Hart and Clausewitz occupy opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum

from "strategic attack, to interdiction, to close air support, to resupply." This includes joint and international airpower assets. Significantly, Moseley's air plan focused not on breaking the regime's will or merely supporting a ground advance. Instead, as the general said, it focused on destruction: "I find it interesting when folks say we're softening them up. We're not softening them up. We're killing them."[1] Rather than paralyzing the enemy, Moseley sought to engage him in decisive battle—as Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz suggested nearly two hundred years ago.

Moseley's words are important for theorists and campaign strategists, for they suggest a role reversal between airpower and landpower and highlight joint success. Furthermore, they suggest a rethinking of contemporary airpower theory, much of which has focused on paralysis. Through this apparent contradiction—an indirect (although aggressive) ground scheme of maneuver, coupled with a direct air attack—Clausewitz appears to explain the joint *Iraqi Freedom* campaign more fully than Liddell Hart. This essay compares the theorists' concepts and analyzes *Iraqi Freedom* in their terms. Which theorist better describes the character of war and thereby points out lessons for future conduct?

### The Theories and *Iraqi Freedom*

Liddell Hart and Clausewitz occupy opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum. Indeed, Liddell Hart disdained Clausewitz and explicitly wrote to overturn what he called "the prime canon of military doctrine . . . that 'the

destruction of the enemy's main forces on the battlefield constituted the only true aim in war.'"[2] Influenced by the horrific trench warfare along the Western Front in World War I, and with an eye toward a better postwar peace, Liddell Hart sought to minimize death and destruction. Believing that one should "subdue the opposing will at the lowest war-cost and minimum injury to the postwar prospect," he argued "it is both more potent, as well as more economical, to disarm the enemy than to attempt his destruction by hard fighting." Therefore, the strategist "should think in terms of paralyzing, not killing," and should use the indirect approach "to upset the opponent's balance, psychological and physical, thereby making possible his overthrow."[3]

The *Iraqi Freedom* ground scheme of maneuver dovetailed with Liddell Hart's indirect approach, which held that "no general is justified in launching his troops to a direct attack upon an enemy firmly in position."[4] Although Soldiers and Marines clearly fought a number of vicious engagements, the land component plan sought to minimize direct contact before Baghdad. Lead elements of 3d Infantry Division's 7th Cavalry Regiment pushed 100 miles into Iraq by March

21—the first full day of the ground war. Lieutenant General William Wallace, Commander, V Corps, planned to bypass towns and admitted surprise at the Iraqi willingness "to attack out of those towns toward our formations, when my expectation was that they would be defending those towns and not be as aggressive."[5] As 1st Marine Expeditionary Force advanced on the right—and after a brief pause following tremendous sandstorms—V Corps encircled, fought, and passed enemy concentrations at Nasiriyah and Najaf. U.S. forces drew within 50 kilometers of Baghdad by April 2, with the Army southwest near Karbala, and the Marines southeast near Al Kut. Two days later, V Corps seized Baghdad International Airport, with follow-on forces eliminating positions bypassed by 3d Infantry Division. Only 5 days later, after destroying remnants of armored divisions between al Kut and Baghdad, 3d Infantry Division and 1st Marine Expeditionary Force linked up in the capital and Saddam's statue fell. Along the way, by moving quickly, exploiting an information campaign, and bypassing engagements, coalition forces achieved one of General Franks' operational objectives for a better peace, "to prevent the destruction of a big chunk of the Iraqi people's future wealth." Liddell Hart would have approved of the CENTCOM commander's economi-



U.S. Soldier standing guard over Republican Guard general

982d Signal Company (Charles B. Johnson)

**Marine tanks approaching the Tigris River on Highway 27**

1st Marine Division Combat Camera (Paul L. Anstine II)

cal approach. It saved lives on both sides and retained Iraqi oilfields for postwar reconstruction.

While Clausewitz also valued economy of force, he most likely would have approached the operational problem differently. For him, economy of force had little to do with saving lives or husbanding resources. Emphasizing that "theory demands the shortest roads to the goal," he argued that economy simply meant not wasting strength.[6] Clausewitz also took a different view of moral and psychological paralysis. For Liddell Hart, moral factors were predominant "in all military decisions. On them constantly turns the issue of war and battle."[7] For Clausewitz, victory lay in "the sum of all strengths, physical as well as moral," and the two were interrelated. Loss in battle would affect the losing side psychologically, which would "in turn, [give] rise to additional loss of

material strength, which is echoed in loss of morale; the two become mutually interactive as each enhances and intensifies the other." Psychological paralysis and physical destruction were inseparable, and Clausewitz highlighted the latter: "destruction of the enemy forces is the overriding principle of war, and, so far as positive action is concerned, the principal way to achieve our object." To underscore his argument in favor of decisive battle, the Prussian flatly stated, "We are not interested in generals who win victories without bloodshed."[8]

Away from embedded reporters and studio briefings, the air component put Clausewitz's ideas into action. Rather than psychologically defeating regime leadership, Airmen waged a classic battle of attrition and took away the regime's ability to respond. According to Major General Daniel Leaf,

senior Airman in the land component headquarters, attacks focused on the Republican Guard, which started Gulf War II with as many as 900 T–72 and T–62 tanks at between 80 and 90 percent effectiveness—more than twice as many tanks as coalition forces had in the theater. Six Republican Guard divisions defended Baghdad; five of those attempted to use the cover of sandstorms on March 25–26 to position themselves between the capital and advancing coalition forces—but found themselves stymied by superior surveillance and targeting from above. When ground forces did make contact with Republican Guard armor on March 30, the Iraqis could not mount a coordinated defense and, in General Wallace's words, "the U.S. Air Force had a heyday against those repositioning forces." From that point on, Moseley exhorted his command to "kill them faster," and April 2–3 saw over 1,300 sorties—80 percent of the daily

totals—target the Republican Guard. Throughout the air war, 15,592 targets, or 82 percent of the total, related to the ground battle.

While battle damage statistics remain classified, open-source information and anecdotal evidence suggest that coalition air forces decimated the Republican Guard. General Leaf highlighted how ground forces found "a tremendous amount of destroyed equipment and a significant number of enemy casualties as they moved toward Baghdad," and on April 3, Major General Stanley McChrystal, USA, Joint

**the form of the decisive battle suggests ground forces maneuver for effect, and air and space forces bring the killing power to the fight**

Staff vice director of operations, told a Pentagon news conference that the Republican Guard units were "no longer credible forces." The following day, an Army intelligence officer briefed commanders that the Medina Republican Guard Division had fallen to 18 percent of full strength while its sister division, the Hammurabi, was down to 44 percent, but noted that "These numbers are somewhat in dispute. They may actually be lower." On April 5, the day the Army made its "thunder run" into Baghdad, Moseley confidently reported, "Our sensors show that the preponderance of the Republican Guard divisions that were outside of Baghdad are now dead."[9]

Clearly, the air component, both alone and in close coordination with ground forces, did more than psychologically imbalance Saddam's regime; it took away its major source of power. In Moseley's words, that allowed the "incredibly brave U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps troops . . . to capitalize on the effect that we've had on the Republican Guard and . . . to exploit that success."[10] Therefore, any depiction of the *Iraqi Freedom* campaign plan in Liddell Hart's terms would be incomplete at best. Certainly the ground forces used maneuver to set conditions for success, and that maneuver, coupled with information operations

and airpower, undoubtedly upset the equilibrium of the Iraqi troops and the regime. However, the "sword" did not drop "from a paralysed hand," as Liddell Hart forecast. Coalition forces destroyed the sword in a Clausewitzian decisive battle.

## Lessons Learned

Interestingly, the form of the decisive battle suggests a role reversal wherein ground forces maneuver for effect, and air and space forces bring the killing power to the fight. Until all the lessons learned and statistical compilations become available, the point will be moot, but airpower had a phenomenal aggregate effect on ground forces in *Iraqi Freedom*. In the long run, the statistics matter less than the fact that jointness triumphed in this fight. The concentration of airpower against armor shows how the joint force commander's tools can be used interchangeably. "Combined arms works like gangbusters," exclaimed Richard Sinnreich, formerly of the Army School of Advanced Military Studies, and re-

tired Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski echoed the enthusiasm: "When the lessons learned come out . . . it is as if we will have discovered a new sweet spot in the relationship between land warfare and air warfare."[11]

In addition to underscoring joint success, *Iraqi Freedom* should redefine the airpower debate in Clausewitzian terms. For much of the 1990s, theorists John Warden and Robert Pape argued about the proper use of airpower. Warden claimed that Airmen should first focus on leadership and critical infrastructure and seldom target fielded forces, while Pape countered that airpower was effective only when focused on those fielded forces.[12] Recent operations, seen through a Clausewitzian lens, suggest a middle ground: fielded forces can be strategic targets.

Clausewitz defined a center of gravity as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends,"[13] and the Republican Guard was precisely that: it undergirded all Saddam's operational and political power. Twelve years earlier, General Norman Schwarzkopf, USA, had called its divisions "the heart and soul" of Saddam's army, and it was the Repub-



**Marines destroying ammunition cache at Republican Guard base near Daly Airfield, Iraq**

**Forum**

lican Guard that brutally suppressed the Shi'ite rebellion after Gulf War I. Indeed, analyst Rebecca Grant, among many others, argued that the Guard kept Saddam in power for nearly two decades, and that decimating Guard forces "signaled that Saddam's control over Iraq was about to collapse for good."[14] What better use could there be for any of the joint force commander's tools than to destroy an operational or strategic center of gravity? To be sure, fielded forces are not always centers of gravity—they were not in Kosovo, for example—but when a regime relies on an elite force to maintain power, airpower should focus on that force's destruction.

Saddam's 20-year reliance on the Republican Guard highlights a final lesson for the military theorist, one that underscores the elegance and completeness of Clausewitz's descriptive power. As argued above, Liddell Hart emphasized paralysis, which he believed would ensure a better peace. Clausewitz, on the other hand, emphasized that war is merely a political tool, and that the aim of combat "is to destroy the enemy's forces as a means to a further end."[15] He cautioned that "the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."[16] After Gulf War I, Saddam proved Clausewitz right. He was paralyzed by General Charles Horner's air war and Schwarzkopf's "left hook" ground campaign. The Republican Guard survived, however, and the United States was tied down in Iraq for the next 12 years. Paralysis proved to be merely the means to an intermediate end—Saddam's ejection from Kuwait, not Liddell Hart's perfection of strategy. In hindsight, the United States would have likely created a better political endstate by engaging in decisive battle in 1991. Even without going to Baghdad, which was politically untenable at the time, coalition forces could have produced a more acceptable regional balance of power by destroying the Republican Guard.



**Light armored vehicles traveling on highway to Euphrates River**

U.S. Marine Corps (Andrew P. Roufs)

## Implications for the Future

Although Clausewitz wrote nearly 200 years ago, and with no concept of airpower, his theory more completely explains recent history than does Liddell Hart's. Furthermore, Clausewitz highlighted a number of pitfalls that could still influence military operations. General Wallace's comment that "the enemy is a bit different from the one we wargamed against" calls to mind one Clausewitzian principle that the strategist will ignore at his peril: uncertainty. The Prussian master argued, "In war, everything is uncertain," lamented the "general unreliability of all information," and warned that the "difficulty of accurate recognition constitutes one of the most serious sources of friction in war."[17]

Much contemporary military thought discounts uncertainty and friction. One prominent historian argued to a National War College audience that the entire spectrum of effects-based operations ignores the very possibility of uncertain information. To be sure, many theorists side with John Warden, who has written that technology will overcome uncertainty, friction, and fog; and the current development of joint operations centers and air operations centers seeks to capitalize on that technol-

ogy. In Operation *Iraqi Freedom,* intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft flew 1,000 sorties and transmitted 42,000 battlefield images, 3,200 hours of full-motion video, and 1,700 hours of moving target images back to Moseley's Combined Air Operations Center. In fairness, that technology undoubtedly contributed to the defeat of the Republican Guard. In one instance, the Marine Operations Center detected a column of vehicles and artillery trying to escape Baghdad by night. Using live video, the watch officer vectored aircraft to the column and observed as they destroyed at least 80 vehicles.

Technology brings danger as well as success, however. Williamson Murray has pointed out that technologies that remove the fog of war "are unlikely because they defy modern science and what science suggests about the world."[18] Uncertainty will rear its head, and both operators in the field and command and control warriors at the various operations centers must prepare for the inevitable moments when communications nodes and data links will drop off the air. Likewise, operations-center personnel must guard against a tendency to micromanage.

Those on the front line will usually have a better ability to make tactical decisions. Lieutenant General Michael Short, USAF, the air component commander for Operation *Allied Force* over Kosovo, stated that his own real-time micromanagement of tactics may have led to, or at least contributed to, shootdown of an F–117. No matter how good data transmission technology becomes, operations-center personnel must force themselves to push execution decisions down to the lowest possible level.

As luck or genius would have it, Clausewitz also suggested a solution. He believed in education, primarily to develop the mind of future commanders, but also because "knowledge must be transformed into genuine capability." If the U.S. military is to both decentralize and take maximum advantage of developing technology, that knowledge transformation

### operations-center personnel must force themselves to push execution decisions down to the lowest possible level

must take place through world-class training. Such training is on the horizon. Distributed mission operations will link mission simulators and operations centers around the world to facilitate large-scale operational- and tactical-level joint training. To be most effective, however, that training must incorporate uncertainty and friction. High-fidelity command and control can actually provide negative learning. As Air National Guard F–16 pilot Major David Meyer reported, "communications are 100 percent in the simulator," but in combat over Iraq, the controller "only hears you 50 percent of the time." Quite simply, distributed mission operations need to include mission-type orders and periods of limited communication. The front-line fighter cannot allow his datalink to become a crutch, lest he lose that crutch the first time in actual combat. Education and training must prepare lieutenants and corporals for action with strategic impact, just as command and control systems must empower them to act alone when appropriate.

To those who watched *Iraqi Freedom* via CNN footage, embedded reporters' updates, and CENTCOM news briefings, the joint campaign appeared to embody a classic indirect approach. Despite difficult fighting around cities such as Nasiriyah, ground forces shot through the country rapidly, leapfrogging enemy strongholds—precisely as Liddell Hart recommended. When they made contact with regular forces, coalition troops quickly defeated them and continued on to Baghdad. The rapid fall of the capital, just days after the Iraqi information minister assured viewers that there were no foreign troops anywhere near the city, suggested that Saddam's regime lay paralyzed by the rapid maneuver.

A closer look reveals a different story. The regime was not paralyzed; it lacked the capability to act. The war was rapidly concluded in Baghdad in part due to the effect of joint and coalition airpower on Republican Guard divisions. In conjunction with landpower, the air component crushed Saddam's major source of power in decisive battle—and once again validated the enduring insights of Carl von Clausewitz. Seen through a Clausewitzian lens, *Iraqi Freedom* air operations highlight joint success and recast the airpower debate: fielded forces can be centers of gravity and strategic targets, and paralysis is a means—not "the perfection of strategy." Finally, Clausewitz's focus on uncertainty cautions against overreliance on command and control technology, but at the same time he suggests a way to counteract uncertainty, fog, and friction. The U.S. military possesses the most incredible assets in the world—its fighting men and women. We must educate them, train them, trust them, then use them. **JFQ**

### NOTES

[1] Rebecca Grant, "Saddam's Elite in the Meat Grinder," *Air Force* (September 2003), 44.

[2] Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy,* 2d revised edition (New York: Meridian, 1991), 339.

See also Howard D. Belote, "Paralyze or Pulverize? Liddell Hart, Clausewitz, and Their Influence on Air Power Theory," *Strategic Review* (Winter 1999), 41.

[3] Liddell Hart, 213.

[4] Ibid., 147.

[5] Rebecca Grant, "Gulf War II: Air and Space Power Led the Way" (Arlington, VA: Aerospace Education Foundation, 2003), 18.

[6] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 624.

[7] Liddell Hart, 4.

[8] Clausewitz, 253–60.

[9] Grant, "Saddam's Elite," 40.

[10] Rebecca Grant, "Hand in Glove," *Air Force* (July 2003), 30–31.

[11] Ibid., 34.

[12] See Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); John A. Warden III, "Success in Modern War: A Reply to Robert Pape's Bombing to Win," *Security Studies* (Winter 1997/1998), 172–190; Robert A. Pape, "The Air Force Strikes Back: A Reply to Barry Watts and John Warden," *Security Studies* (Winter 1997/1998), 191–214; and Karl Mueller, "Strategies of Coercion: Denial, Punishment, and the Future of Air Power," *Security Studies* (Spring 1998), 182–228.

[13] Clausewitz, 595–96.

[14] Grant, "Saddam's Elite," 40.

[15] Clausewitz, 97.

[16] Ibid., 80.

[17] Ibid., 117.

[18] Williamson Murray, "The Evolution of Joint Warfare," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 2002), 36.